Rethinking the Role of English Language Teaching in Europe

*Lili Cavalheiro**

English has assumed a place and a role in the world that no other language has ever had before. It is visible in a wide number of domains playing an important part, such as in science and tourism, in urban and youth popular culture and advertising; in addition, it is the official language of countless international organizations. What is noteworthy, though, is that, apart from being spoken by approximately 350 million native speakers, English is now mainly used for communication among non-native speakers who do not share any other language. In fact, what used to be a national language in inner circle countries (Braj Kachru, 1985 and his concentric circle model[1]) has grown to become the first true lingua franca worldwide.

Alongside the development of English into a lingua franca, the 'ownership' of the language has also shifted. It no longer is the personal property of native speakers alone, but belongs to everyone who uses the language, native users, L2 users and non-native users. Thus, the desire to obtain native speaker-likeness in spoken or written English becomes questionable for the majority of its learners.

With this changing role of English, a reflection on the teaching of English as a foreign language (TEFL) is called upon in order to provide better real-life situations students are likely to encounter once outside the classroom and in the real world.

In this paper, I will consider the presence of English in continental Europe and its unique linguistic scenario; following Berns (1995), I will analyze the three central features concerning its specificity: the multiple roles of English, the nativization or Europeanization process, and the shared patterns of acquisition and use. It is only by first understanding the various functions English has taken on in our society and how its speakers are adapting it to their needs that we can at a second moment reflect on the pedagogical implications associated with English Language Teaching (ELT).

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* ULICES/CEAUL / Faculdade de Letras, Universidade de Lisboa

[1] In Inner circle countries, English is generally used as the primary language, such as in Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States. Countries situated in the Outer circle are characterized as being multilingual and use English as a second language, as is the case in India and Singapore. Lastly, in the Expanding circle countries, English is learned as a foreign language, such as in Portugal, China and France.

I will also focus on the dichotomy ELF and EFL, emphasizing on the importance of an ELF approach where English as a language for supranational communication is emphasized, with stress on intercultural communication and language awareness, in which communication strategies and accommodation skills are essential. By doing so, the notion of plurilingualism through English will reinforce and contribute to the idea that national and European identities are not monolithic.

1. The rising presence of English as a Lingua Franca in Europe

English has become a global language at all levels in today's society. However, to what extent has it flourished within the European continent?

The English language is gradually considered as a lingua franca or even L2 of the European community at large. In many cases, it functions as the default language of communication among Europeans in multilingual and multicultural settings, and its presence within national borders is established in a number of domains, such as in tertiary education, advertising, the media, and science and technology. Bearing in mind this widespread use of English, Europe can be depicted today as a unique linguistic scenario, where English is employed as a lingua franca in both inter— and intra-national communication.

By taking into consideration this distinctive sociolinguistic situation where boundaries overlap, to refer to English solely as a foreign language and as a part of Kachru's expanding circle is currently deemed as inadequate. The European context is so unique that it cannot be integrated within the three clearly demarcated circles model proposed by Kachru (1985).

Let us consider the first specific feature in this unique scenario. English plays several roles within a unified Europe — mother tongue, foreign language and international language. In Great Britain and Ireland, for instance, it functions largely as a native and second language, while in other countries, such as in Portugal and Germany, it is a foreign or international language. In the latter countries, knowledge of English is generally deemed as widespread, especially in Nordic countries. The Netherlands, for instance, have long introduced a language policy where English is a compulsory subject in both primary and secondary school. Given these measures, the Dutch have practically become bilingual, up to the point where English practically takes on the role of a second language in society. The reality in Mediterranean countries, however, is rather different because English was only implemented as a compulsory language at a much later date and, for that reason, English proficiency at a national level is still a project in progress.

The second specific feature of this scenario concerns a nativization process. English is undergoing a nativization, or even Europeanization, process. In fact, speakers of English are instinctively, or intentionally, adapting and introducing innovations from their mother tongues that, in effect, de-Anglicize and de-Americanize English. Among the several linguistic processes involved in this nativization process, the most striking ones include lexical borrowings, functional allocation and discoursal

nativization. Although these features are not exclusive to the European situation, they do reflect specific social contexts of use and the recognition of a "European-using speech community" (Berns 1995: 7), that is, a community which includes "those uses of English that are not British (and American or Canadian or Australian or any other native variety), but are distinctly European and distinguish European English speakers from speakers of other varieties" (Berns 1995: 7).

Lastly, the third feature referred to in Berns (1995) is associated with the shared patterns of acquisition and use of English. Given that in continental Europe contact with English is not solely restricted to the classroom, but also present on a daily basis, Europeans share similar opportunities to the exposure of English and interaction with both L1 and non-L1 speakers. Preisler (1999) in a study focusing on the Danish population refers to two types of English contact: English from above and English from below. In the former case, language is transmitted from a top-down learning process where "the promotion of English [is done] by the hegemonic culture for purposes of 'international communication'" (Preisler 1999: 241). Traditionally associated with a formal language learning environment within national borders, and usually restricted to the classroom, 'English from above' consists of three essential functions (264):

> 1. Constituting a formal element of education by way of preparing people for the international aspects of their professional lives
>
> 2. Providing a foundation of the individual's formal acquisition of 'English from below' in any of it particular manifestations, including the ability to participate in activities representing subcultural interests and self-expression
>
> 3. Ensuring that nobody leaves schools without a minimum of reading and listening skills in English and a realisation of the importance of maintaining such skills.

'English from below' (Preisler 1999), on the other hand, refers to language learning by way of a bottom-up process or even individually. This type of process is frequent in popular music or sports, and with other youth subcultures (e.g. computers and hip hop). In subcultures, like with science and technology, vocabulary denoting these particular practices tend to be in English and, from early on, there is a type of ritual in which English and code-switching are a part of these underground environments where youngsters communicate, not only with their friends, but also in cyber-space. As a result, contrary to the reality of not too long ago, when what was learned in the classroom was later applied in the outside world, today, outside experiences are brought into the classroom, contributing to a new reality and establishing a point of departure for both teachers and students to develop and work on their language skills.

Bearing in mind these three features, it is safe to say that, in Europe, English no longer takes on the role of a foreign language in the traditional sense of the word — a language and a culture to be learned so as to communicate with native speakers.

On the contrary, it has developed into a language essentially spoken among other non-native speakers, given that it is this group that makes up the majority of English speakers in the world. The emphasis bestowed on the knowledge of English has been the result of it being an advantageous asset for citizens of the European Union to move freely across borders to live, work and get an education both within and outside their home country.

Due to this ever growing multilingual and multicultural society, the role of ELT is also called upon to reflect and reconsider the educational policies adopted by governments in preparing future language teachers and students for the reality of the language outside the classroom.

2. Consequences and changes in English Language Teaching

Several are the models which have been adopted for ELT in Europe, depending on the situation and the learner's needs and aims. According to Melchers and Shaw (2003), when considering what type of English should be taught in schools, various factors need to be taken into consideration, such as the exposure given to the students, the model that should be imitated and the target to aim for. To define these three concepts the objective in education has to be classified accordingly, whether it is for national use, for foreign language learning (introducing learners to a different culture) or for international language learning (allowing learners to communicate across cultural and linguistic boundaries).

In the particular context of globalization, ELT should consider taking on an approach which reflects the global diversity of the language, preparing its learners with the necessary skills in their lives. As Graddol (2006:82) points out, there are diverse methods to learn English, being nowadays strategies especially centered on a global reality:

These new approaches, however, have not always caught on without great debate and, in some cases, they are still frowned upon. The reason may be because, traditionally, ELT has always focused on English as a foreign language which mainly

> (…) tends to highlight the importance of learning about the culture and society of native speakers; it stresses the centrality of the methodology in discussions of effective learning; and emphasizes the importance of emulating native speaker language behaviour. (Graddol 2006: 82)

According to this point of view, the learner is deemed as someone who is positioned as an outsider, constantly struggling to gain access to the target community, but who will never entirely be a part of it; the language will ultimately always be considered as someone else's mother tongue. As Graddol (83) further claims, "The learner is constructed as a linguistic tourist — allowed to visit, but without rights of residence and required always to respect the superior authority of native speakers".

However, as already argued, the role of English has assumed a 'global' domain in the last decades and, under these circumstances, English should be learned so as

to meet the communicative needs of students; rather than aiming at a near-native proficiency of a prestigious variety; in addition, importance should also be given to the functions of clarity in cross-cultural communicative scenarios (Modiano 2000).

The cross-cultural role of an international language like English should focus on notions, such as intercultural communication and language awareness, where communication strategies and accommodation skills are essential (Seidlhofer 2002: 22). Such strategies/ skills comprise: resorting to extralinguistic cues, supportive listening, signaling non-comprehension, repetition and paraphrasing, among others. Yet another aspect which makes the acquisition of communicative abilities possible when communicating in lingua franca situations is the exposure to a wide range of varieties, so as to become linguistically aware of the diverse possibilities in the English language.

With regard to communication in lingua franca situations, Graddol (2006) refers to an original ELT model in Europe known as the English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) approach[2] which he believes reflects present day aims and the departure from an EFL approach. The concept of ELF is thus characterized in Graddol (2006: 87) as "probably the most radical and controversial approach to emerge in recent years", being widely debated by scholars in Applied Linguistics. Inevitably, the implications of this fairly recent phenomenon and innovative outlook, which regards English as the possession of the whole world and the property of all who use it (Widdowson 1993), have brought several new suggestions and changes in cross-cultural English teaching.

Keeping in mind the debate on ELF teaching standards in the expanding circle, what can be expected and what changes are here involved?

Many opinions have supported the argument that, if expanding circle speakers use English essentially for lingua franca communication, then English teaching should prepare learners more for this type of contact, rather than for communication with native speakers (the precise aim of EFL teaching). Although language teachers and developers of teaching materials should make ELT as relevant as possible, the perspective that ELF is not a stable variety would make it an incorrect teaching standard. However, that does not impede the teaching of lingua franca communication strategies, so as to effectively accommodate one's discourse according to the situation in question.

To better understand the dichotomy between EFL and ELF, let us consider Gnutzmann's approach (1999), regarding how the aims in teaching EFL and ELF vary, in terms of English language usage and norms. Some of the differences can be illustrated as follows (1999: 162-163):

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[2] Graddol (2006) makes reference to two other ELT models which include English for Young Learners and Content and Language Integrated Learning.

ELF prepares learners to communicate with non-native speakers of English from all over the world.
EFL prepares learners to communicate with native speakers of English in English-speaking countries.
ELF is neutral with regard to the different cultural backgrounds of the interlocutors. Depending on how long the communication lasts, the interlocutors will 'negotiate' and establish some kind of common intercultural basis.
EFL is based on the linguistic and sociocultural norms of native speakers of English and their respective cultures.
ELF communication is not based on any particular national linguistic standard of English. Relying on native speaker norms (or near-native norms) cannot guarantee that the communication will be successful. On the contrary, using elaborate linguistic structures or vocabulary may even be harmful to the success of the communication, if the interlocutor does not share a similar linguistic repertoire.
EFL communication is based on Standard English, generally British or American English. The better the learners are able to handle the grammatical rules and lexis of the standard language, the more successful they tend to be in their communication with native speakers.

In sum, from this perspective, ELF users are not only communicating in English, but are communicating with individuals from different cultures. As previously mentioned, what characterizes lingua franca interaction is the multiple and varying relations in constant mutation and for that reason the need to stimulate communication in multidimensional situations. Therefore, the focus in the classroom should become one of communication, rather than the acquisition of a strictly idealized norm. Intelligibility is of primary importance, rather than native-like accuracy, so consequently, emphasis should be placed on communication, reception and accommodation when teaching oral skills. Moreover, the act of communicating should also be intimately linked with the negotiation of meaning, especially when using English worldwide, where the flexibility and capacity of adjustment of its speakers is essential in order to make themselves understood (Erling 2004: 251).

Furthermore, it is also necessary to consider the role of native speakers in ELF, since lingua franca communicative situations include interaction not only between non-native speaker — non-native speaker, as has already been discussed, but also between non-native speaker — native speaker, or even native speaker — native speaker[3].

[3] Native speaker interaction in this sense focuses on speakers from different inner circle varieties, which despite being standardized varieties have some lexical and grammatical differences (e.g. differences between Australian and Irish English may be more unfamiliar when compared with British and American English).

For that reason, issues, such as pragmatic strategies and core phonology[4] (Jenkins 2000), as well as the avoidance of certain difficult structures and infrequent words characteristic of a national variety (Mollin 2006) are essential for successful communication.

Having reflected on the notion of EFL vs. ELF and on what it consists of, the role of the language instructor, either native or non-native, is also fundamental for transmitting and implementing such a perspective. According to Tomlinson (2006: 141), there is no preference between native-speaker and non-native speaker, what matters is 1) the attitude and strategies adapted, namely focusing on efficient communication, 2) being open minded in relation to any variety of English which achieves effective interaction and 3) being able to use and transmit to others communicative strategies of tolerance towards variation and participant cooperation.

As the idyllic aim in an ELF classroom is that of a cross-cultural communicative competence[5], the traditional supremacy associated with the native teacher does not seem necessary, since non-native instructors are familiar with the linguistic complexities of both the mother tongue and the target language in contact; consequently, they are better suited to provide students with a pluralistic cultural perspective (Modiano 2005: 26), given that they too went through the same learning process as their students. In order to achieve such a pluralistic perspective, respect ought to be shown towards diverse practices and beliefs, a reality that non-native teachers are more familiar with when compared to natives. Since they are already accustomed and experienced with diverse contact situations it is also likely that they are more familiar with various communicative strategies for overcoming obstacles between people from different linguistic, cultural and social orientations. Therefore, non-native speakers may be regarded as the more suitable ones for establishing a lingua franca domain and for legitimizing, codifying and standardizing non-native varieties which are a reflection of their own mindset, as well as distinctive from the native speaker's frames of reference.

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[4] Jenkins has developed a 'Lingua Franca Core' for international pronunciation, based on empirical data drawn from English as an International Language (EIL) interactions. The instances where pronunciation causes miscommunication and where other items also cause miscommunication on a regular basis are designated as belonging to the 'core'. On the other hand, items differing from native speaker pronunciation, but not causing miscommunication, are designated as 'non-core' and instead of being regarded as errors, are regarded as instances of L2 regional variation.

[5] Berns (2006: 719) refers to the notion of 'communicative competence' with regard to Dell Hymes as a "knowledge of sociolinguistic rules that is separate from knowledge of grammatical rules". Communicating is more than just producing grammatically correct sentences.

3. Final remarks

English and globalization have gone hand in hand during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Consequently, English has influenced not only the globalization process, but globalization in itself has also greatly contributed to the changes in the English language. Moreover, not only has English changed, but also the discourse concerning the language, which has shifted to capture a new reality surrounding its use.

In the European context, the use of English reflects an emerging multi-linguistic community, as Europeans are not using English instead of their national languages, but in addition to them. All European languages continue to have their own place; each one is used at its own level, both as mother tongue, where it plays a fundamental role within national environments, and as a foreign language. However, the role of English in this context emerges as the language of communication at a European and international level, the language which crosses linguistic barriers.

As a result of this unique situation, teaching objectives in Europe may consider an ELF approach where English as a language for supranational communication (Breidbach 2003) is emphasized, with stress on intelligibility and communicative competences (Berns 2006, and House 2002) but always keeping in mind the teaching of national and regional languages as well. By doing so, the notion of plurilingualism through English will reinforce and contribute to the idea that national and European identities are not monolithic.

Despite all that has been discussed in terms of ELF, the adoption of these communicative strategies should not be judged as a simplistic approach to the language. These speakers should be perceived rather as part of a privileged group, who have access to a wide range of languages and cultures, and whose aim is to negotiate meaning, while retaining at the same time their own identity and attitude (House 2007: 16):

> Multicultural and intercultural actants should be looked upon as belonging to a privileged group whose members can achieve a wide range of important and interesting things by means of having more than one language and culture at their disposal and showing it. They show it by their specific ways of marking identity, attitudes and alliances, signaling discourse functions, conveying politeness, creating aesthetic and humorous effects, or pragmatic ambiguity and so on.

To conclude, these proposals emphasize the notion that English language teaching is going through a process of change due to the fact that languages are being continuously reshaped by their users, so as to serve their communicative and psychological needs, just as each generation reworks its cultural inheritance to meet the needs of communities and individuals (Berns *et al.* 2007: 7). The idea is then not to center our knowledge on a single model or approach, but rather to 'think globally and act locally' according to each situation.

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